

THE AGE OF BLACKPOWDER



At 13:00 in the afternoon the attack on the Allied lines commenced with the French Grande Batterie opening fire for some time before d'Erlon's Corps was ordered to advance across the field. At La Haye Sainte two columns of French skirmishers soon managed to surround allied defenders in the farm. The desperate fighting had begun and more Germans, this time the Hanoverian Lüneberg Battalion, were ordered forward to help the defence of the farm, but they were intercepted and cut down by French Cavalry, their few survivors made their way on into the farm. At 14:00 a charge, now famously called 'Charge of the Scots Greys' relieved for a time the hard pressed German defenders of the farm.

La Haye Sainte, pivotal bastion at the centre of the battle of Waterloo

On the morning of the 18th of June 1815, when battle was imminent, the men of the 2nd Light Battalion of the King's German Legion were sent to take up a defensive position in and about the farm complex of La Haye Sainte, there to await the inevitable bloody engagement against Imperial French forces. The ensuing battle would go down in history as the final and pivotal major engagement of the Napoleonic Wars, this battle would be forever known as the Battle of Waterloo.



By 14:30 additional reinforcements had arrived at the farm in the form of the 1st Light Battalion of the King's German Legion ready for the second major assault of the day. Although the French still vastly outnumbered the German defenders they were unable to bring their greater numbers to bear and had to break off the assault. The French had died en masse, the living were unable to make much headway over the bodies of their slain as numerous corpses had by now become used as bulwarks by the defenders.



Beyond the farm, at 15:00 Marshal Ney ordered over 8,000 French Cavalry to attack the Allied lines across the field of battle. On seeing the French charging headlong at allied lines outside the farm, the officer in charge of defending La Haye Sainte ordered his men, from the relative safety of the farm, to put down withering fire into this massive French cavalry charge. As a bastion at the centre of the battle line, the defenders of La Haye Sainte themselves had taken relatively few casualties considering the pivotal effect they were still having. Though after laying down much fire into the flanks of the French cavalry they now had drastically reduced their own ammunition reserves, something which would cost them dear later in the battle as their subsequent calls for more ammunition would go unheeded at the allied lines.

By 17:00, as a continuation of the brutal combat that had already occurred about the farm with little effect, the French infantry changed tactics and now attempted to burn the defenders out, successfully setting fire to the barn. The defenders now took many casualties collecting water from the pond to douse the fire.

By 18:30 the defenders were still holding firm, but now they were down to roughly 5 shots a man. Firing the last of their ammunition they then engaged their tenacious French assailants in brutal building to building, room to room close quarter fighting. By now, with no ammo left and all the time more French swarming over the walls and on top of the roofs of the buildings, the defenders were in an untenable position, they had to withdraw from their last stand in the farm house, off through the garden.



The French bringing up some guns now garrisoned La Haye Sainte. From this position they fired repeatedly into the 27th (Enniskillen) Regiment who were in Square and held their ground, the fire from these French guns was so heavy that after the battle that British battalion was said to be "lying dead in square". The French garrison's action then allowed the Old Guard to advance on into the Allied lines, when the tide turned again, the Old Guard were offered to surrender but refused preferring to be destroyed with honour. Now with the Prussians also arriving in ever greater numbers, this effectively was the end of the Battle of Waterloo in favour of the allies. Of the original 400 men who had been ordered to defend La Haye Sainte only 42 were still able to fight.

